

WHOM GODS HAVE FAVORED

By Denyse M. Bridger

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Reviewed by :: Melanie Hayden

An e-book

The setting of Denyse M. Bridger's *Whom Gods Have Favored* reaches out and grabs the reader by the throat—in just a few paragraphs, Bridger draws the reader into the lush and decadent world of Pompeii and the Roman Empire as a whole. The characters, in particular, simply *belong* in this setting and no other. From the first moment General Lucius sees the beautiful slave girl Xina put up for sale, their relationship is defined by the world in which they live. He is the master, she is the slave, and yet neither of them will remain content in those positions.

As Xina joins Lucius's household as both servant and paramour, she quickly begins to sense the discord that flows beneath the surface of this wealthy and influential Roman family. From his distant wife to his vengeful daughter and cruel, mysterious son, Lucius may be king on the battlefield, but his family is much more difficult to control. When his relationship with Xina turns into more than a whim, Lucius finds it more difficult that he had anticipated to protect Xina from both his family and the world in which they live. With Mount Vesuvius rumbling ominously beneath their feet, everything Lucius and Xina know is in jeopardy—can the dark secret of Lucius's son save them both?

As noted, the setting of *Whom Gods Have Favored* is the book's strongest selling point. The research is evident, and Bridger's characters are comfortable in their world. Lucius is immediately a strong, sensual character and his desire leaps off the page. Xina, on the other hand, is a little less well defined. She is introduced as a strong, take no prisoners heroine but seems to undergo a personality change when she enters Lucius's household. I wanted her to show him that spark, because he seemed like a man who finds it both maddening and desirable, but instead Xina retreats into typical slave-girl mode almost immediately. While this is probably more realistic, it was a little disappointing. The attraction between them feels genuine, however, and though the introduction of the paranormal element is only peripherally connected to the main characters until the epilogue, it provided an interesting resolution to the story.

4 Kisses